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**UNITED STATES  
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE**



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**Quality Of Mail Service  
In Southeastern Wisconsin**

**United States Postal Service**

The Postal Service measures quality of service primarily in terms of delivery performance of first-class mail. More than 97 percent of first-class stamped mail committed to overnight service in southeastern Wisconsin arrives on time. Service is inconsistent for other classes of mail, however.

Mail distribution problems in southeastern Wisconsin most often involve either transportation fou-ups, human error, or equipment breakdowns. It is unlikely that these problems can be eliminated.



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
DIVISION

B-114874

OCT 22 1976

The Honorable Robert W. Kasten, Jr.  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Kasten:

This report is in response to your request that we examine the quality of mail service in southeastern Wisconsin.

As you requested, Postal Service comments have not been obtained, although the matters contained in the report were discussed with Service officials in southeastern Wisconsin.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Victor L. Lowe".

Victor L. Lowe  
Director

C o n t e n t s

		<u>Page</u>
DIGEST		i
CHAPTER		
1	INTRODUCTION	1
	First-class mail delivery standards	1
	Milwaukee SCF delivery commitments	2
2	QUALITY OF MAIL SERVICE IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN	3
	Performance for overnight delivery of first-class mail is good	3
	Performance for 2- and 3-day first-class mail meets or exceeds national and regional performance	5
	Expanded first-class mail service has not been successful	6
	Second-, third-, and fourth-class mail service is inconsistent	7
	Postal patrons' views of service	9
	What postal patrons in southeastern Wisconsin can expect in mail service	10
3	WHAT CAUSES MAIL DELIVERY PROBLEMS?	11
	Transportation	11
	Processing	12
	Agency Comments	15
4	CHANGES IN PROCESSING AND DISTRIBUTION AT MILWAUKEE SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY	16
5	SCOPE OF REVIEW	18
APPENDIX		
I	Letter dated February 18, 1976, from Congressman Robert W. Kasten	19
II	Wisconsin counties and post offices included in Milwaukee Sectional Center area	20
III	Overnight sectional center facilities served by Milwaukee Sectional Center Facility	22

IV            Delivery areas upgraded under the Service  
                 Improvement Program, Milwaukee sectional  
                 center

ABBREVIATIONS

GAO            General Accounting Office  
ODIS            Origin Destination Information System  
SCF            Sectional Center Facility

D I G E S T

First-class mail delivery service in southeastern Wisconsin meets or exceeds national and regional averages, yet the public still complains about the quality of service.

HOW DOES SERVICE IN SOUTHEASTERN  
WISCONSIN COMPARE TO OTHER AREAS?

The Postal Service measures quality of service primarily in terms of delivery performance on first-class mail, with emphasis on overnight delivery. Postal standards provide for

- 1-day (overnight) delivery within local areas,
- 2-day delivery within a 600-mile radius, and
- 3-day delivery for all other first-class mail.

The Service's goal is to meet these standards 95 percent of the time. (See p. 1.)

Statistics compiled by the Service's Origin-Destination Information System show that 97 percent of first-class stamped mail originating in or destined for southeastern Wisconsin (and committed to overnight delivery) arrives on time. This compares favorably to 94 percent for the 13-State Central Region and 95 percent nationwide.

Performance for second- and third-day delivery, is between 91 and 92 percent. This also compares favorably to regional and national averages of 90 and 91 percent, respectively. (See p. 5.)

IF SERVICE IS SO GOOD,  
WHY DO PEOPLE COMPLAIN?

In southeastern Wisconsin 3,844 complaints were filed with the Postal Service for the 6 months ended March 31, 1976. (See p. 9.) Although nearly 45 percent of the complaints concerned poor mail delivery, many also expressed concern about such matters as service hours, personnel, money orders and damage to parcel post. Following are some possible reasons for the complaints.

GGD-77-2

--Although only 3 percent of the first-class overnight mail handled by the Milwaukee Sectional Center Facility did not meet delivery standards, this represents about 4.8 million letters. This small percentage, particularly if it includes important mail, causes considerable dissatisfaction. Most of these letters no doubt were only a day or two late, but some were excessively delayed, lost, mutilated or destroyed.

--Service in certain areas served by the Milwaukee Sectional Center Facility is much worse than the average. For example, mail to Rockford, Illinois, from Milwaukee had a 75-percent ontime delivery record. (See p. 4.)

#### WHAT CAUSES DELIVERY PROBLEMS?

The mail distribution system involves a complex transportation and handling network; the potential for error is therefore great. Problems noted in southeastern Wisconsin involved

- transportation foulups, either mechanical or weather-related,
- human error in sorting and dispatching mail, and
- processing equipment breakdowns and malfunctions. (See p. 11.)

Local officials feel they have been doing the best job possible within budget limitations. They added that the staff-hour budget for fiscal year 1977 is about 9.6 percent (1 million staff-hours valued at about \$9 million) below fiscal year 1976 actual usage. According to the officials this reduction is bound to hurt delivery performance in southeastern Wisconsin. (See p. 15.)

#### RECENT OR PLANNED CHANGES AT MILWAUKEE FACILITY

The Postal Service has recently made or is planning to make certain changes in the distribution and processing systems at the Milwaukee Sectional Center Facility.

They involve

- realignment of mail sorting functions of sectional center facilities, increasing Milwaukee's daily volume by about 270,000 pieces;

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--transferring some parcel post operations from the Milwaukee facility to the bulk mail facility at Chicago; and

--bringing most first-class local post offices under the area mail processing concept to decrease the distribution and cancellation workload at the associate offices.

These changes may be economically desirable but are unlikely to improve the area's mail service. (See p. 16.)

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Postal Service has developed an extensive mail collection, transportation, and distribution system. Under this system, mail is brought to a Sectional Center Facility (SCF) from collection points in an area to be processed and sent to its destination. The concept of centralized mail processing is based on the assumption that it is more efficient and economical than processing mail at thousands of local post offices. There are 555 SCFs across the Nation that process mail for more than 30,000 local offices.

The Milwaukee SCF--the largest in Wisconsin--serves 138 post offices, which in turn serve all or parts of 13 counties in southeastern Wisconsin. (See app. II.) Besides processing all incoming and outgoing mail for this area, the SCF serves as the arrival point (State distribution center) for all out-of-State mail destined for Wisconsin.

About 1.1 billion pieces of mail are processed annually at the Milwaukee SCF. The Milwaukee SCF employs about 5,900 people and had estimated operating expenses for fiscal year 1976 of about \$108 million.

### FIRST-CLASS MAIL DELIVERY STANDARDS

The Postal Service has established the following standards for delivery of first-class mail:

- 1 day (overnight) within designated areas (generally, within sectional center areas and among adjoining sectional center areas),
- 2 days for mail within a 600-mile radius, and
- 3 days for all other first-class mail.

These standards apply to all first-class mail, including stamped, franked, and government, which has the proper address and ZIP code and which is posted by the last mail pickup time--generally 5 p.m. The Service's goal is to deliver 95 percent of the first-class mail within these standards.

## MILWAUKEE SCF DELIVERY COMMITMENTS

The Service has established standards or goals for second-, third-, and fourth-class mail, but the most important standard to the Service is overnight delivery of first-class mail. One-day delivery commitments are generally made only to those areas for which postal management expects to be able to deliver 95 percent of the mail overnight. The Milwaukee SCF's overnight areas differ depending on whether the mail is destined for or originates in the Milwaukee SCF area. Mail destined for six adjoining SCF areas--Rockford and North Suburban in Illinois and Madison, Portage, Oshkosh, and Green Bay in Wisconsin--is committed to overnight delivery. Only mail originating in the four adjacent Wisconsin SCF areas is committed to overnight delivery in the Milwaukee SCF area. (See app. III.)

In October 1975, the Service implemented, on a test basis, the Service Improvement Program which eliminated airmail and upgraded first-class mail service commitments.

Under this program, the Milwaukee SCF extended overnight service to Chicago and 16 other cities. Overnight service to the 16 cities was accorded only to mail deposited at the Milwaukee post office by 2, 3, or 4 p.m., depending upon the city. The SCF also extended 2-day delivery service to 14 new areas. (See app. IV.)

## CHAPTER 2

### THE QUALITY OF MAIL SERVICE

#### IN SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

The Postal Service measures the quality of service primarily in terms of delivery performance for first-class mail. Postal Service statistics show that for fiscal year 1976 through March 26, 1976, delivery of first-class stamped mail committed to overnight service in southeastern Wisconsin exceeded the Service's goal of 95 percent ontime delivery. Although 2- and 3-day service met or exceeded national and regional averages for ontime deliveries, it did not meet the Service's 95-percent goal.

Even if all Postal Service goals were met, many millions of pieces of mail would still be delivered late in southeastern Wisconsin. This causes complaints. Timeliness of first-class mail is not the only matter of public concern in the area, however. Concern also exists over delivery performance for second-, third-, and fourth-class mail; timely receipt of parcel post without damage; window and collection hours; employee courtesy; postage rates; and other matters.

#### PERFORMANCE FOR OVERNIGHT DELIVERY OF FIRST-CLASS MAIL IS GOOD

The Postal Service's commitment is to deliver overnight 95 percent of first-class mail originating in the Milwaukee SCF and destined for southern or eastern Wisconsin or northern Illinois. The overnight delivery commitment for mail destined for Milwaukee includes only southern and eastern Wisconsin.

Statistics indicating how well the Service achieves its goals are collected under its Origin-Destination Information System (ODIS). Under the system, delivery time is measured from the date mail is postmarked to the date it reaches the last delivery unit before being placed in the addressee's hands. ODIS does not recognize delays that can occur before postmarking or in delivery. Because the Postal Service does not postmark franked and metered mail, ODIS cannot measure its delivery performance as accurately as that of stamped mail. Nevertheless, we have no evidence that franked and metered mail is handled differently from stamped mail once it enters the processing system or that its delivery performance is much different.

ODIS statistics for southeastern Wisconsin for fiscal year 1976 (through March 26, 1976) show that 97 percent of first-class stamped mail committed to overnight delivery arrived on time. The performance for the Milwaukee SCF area exceeded the 13-State Central Region overnight delivery average of 94 percent and the national average of 95 percent.

Although only 3 percent of the first-class overnight stamped mail going through the Milwaukee SCF does not meet the standard, this means that about 4.8 million pieces annually are being delivered late. Most of these letters will be a day or two late; some, however, can be excessively delayed, lost, mutilated, or destroyed. Obviously, such a large volume of late mail can cause substantial customer dissatisfaction.

The following table illustrates overnight delivery performance to and from the Milwaukee SCF area during the period.

<u>Overnight area</u>	<u>Percent delivered on time</u>	
	<u>Mail originating in Milwaukee SCF area</u>	<u>Mail destined for delivery in Milwaukee SCF area</u>
Total SCF	<u>97</u>	<u>97</u>
Local and Intra-SCF	98	98
Madison, WI SCF	96	96
Portage, WI SCF	89	96
Green Bay, WI SCF	92	91
Oshkosh, WI SCF	94	90
North Suburban, IL SCF	71	(a)
Rockford, IL SCF	75	(a)

a/ Not included.

The above table shows that not all geographical areas receive the same level of service. For example, letters from the Milwaukee SCF to the Portage SCF receive overnight delivery 89 percent of the time, whereas letters from Milwaukee to Madison receive such service 96 percent of the time. Some postal patrons may be dissatisfied with this lower percentage of ontime delivery to some areas.

Another potential area of customer dissatisfaction is situations in which mail moving in one direction receives better service than that moving in the opposite direction. As shown in the table, the Postal Service commits itself to overnight delivery of mail from Milwaukee to

northern Illinois. Yet, it has not made the same commitment for mail moving in the opposite direction because of the large volume of mail being handled by the North Suburban SCF and transportation scheduling problems.

How then can overall delivery performance be 97 percent when areas such as Rockford receive only 75-percent delivery performance? Primarily because most mail (86 to 90 percent) committed to overnight delivery originates and is destined for addresses within the Milwaukee SCF area. This large volume, 98 percent of which is delivered on time, limits the impact on the statistics of the poorer service rendered in the other overnight areas.

Milwaukee SCF and district officials were aware that some areas are not consistently receiving overnight service that meets Postal Service goals. They believe that the problem primarily involves inconsistencies in the transportation network. Correcting this problem would require additional transportation routes and personnel, measures which, in their opinion, are not economically feasible.

PERFORMANCE FOR 2- AND 3-DAY  
FIRST-CLASS MAIL MEETS OR EXCEEDS  
NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PERFORMANCE

For mail to and from the Milwaukee SCF area, the Postal Service has committed itself to 2-day service within the region and 3-day service to the rest of the country. The Service's goal is for 95 percent of the mail to be delivered within these standards.

Milwaukee SCF delivery performance to 2- and 3-day areas, while not meeting standards, generally equaled or exceeded national and regional performance. The following table contrasts national, regional, and Milwaukee SCF delivery performance for fiscal year 1976 (through March 26, 1976).

Percentage of Mail Delivered On Time

Delivery area	Originating mail			Destinating mail		
	National	Regional	Milwaukee SCF	National	Regional	Milwaukee SCF
2-day	91	91	91	91	90	92
3-day	90	90	91	90	91	92

Milwaukee SCF officials said that they were aware that 2- and 3-day mail was not delivered within the standards and that the problem primarily involves transportation. They maintained that the longer the transportation network, the greater the chance for problems.

EXPANDED FIRST-CLASS MAIL SERVICE  
HAS NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL

In October 1975, the Postal Service implemented, on a test basis, the Service Improvement Program which eliminated airmail and upgraded first-class mail service commitments. This was to be achieved primarily by expanding overnight and 2-day delivery areas.

Under this program:

- Milwaukee SCF mail was to receive overnight service to Chicago.
- City of Milwaukee mail was to be delivered overnight to 16 other cities.
- Milwaukee SCF mail was to be delivered within 2 days to 14 areas, that previously had a 3-day delivery standard.

A map was prominently posted in the lobby of the Milwaukee Post Office informing the public of the service it could expect under the program. (For a list of new areas, see app. IV.) The Service's goal was to achieve 95-percent ontime delivery to these areas.

The following table, shows that for certain areas <sup>1/</sup>, service was inconsistent and the 95-percent goal was rarely attained.

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1/ Because of limitations in the Service's measurement system, an accurate measure of delivery performance is not available for all areas.

4 week periods (1975-1976)	Percent of mail delivered overnight to Chicago	Percent of mail delivered to selected States within 2 days				
		CA	CT	NJ	NY	PA
10/11-11/07	53	55	91	63	62	92
11/08-12/05	67	70	81	48	83	85
12/06-01/02	40	20	42	26	54	80
01/03-01/30	61	37	30	55	60	82
01/31-02/27	64	51	45	90	87	83
02/28-03/26	72	60	35	65	82	94

What do these statistics mean for postal patron in the Milwaukee area? Basically, that the Service is not meeting its goal under this program. Unless improvements are made, postal patrons may in time conclude that the Postal Service is advertising service that it cannot deliver, causing dissatisfaction and complaints.

SECOND-, THIRD-, AND FOURTH-CLASS  
MAIL SERVICE IS INCONSISTENT

Although the Service has established delivery standards for these classes of mail, it only measures performance for parcel post. We believe that postal patrons can expect inconsistent delivery service for most second-, third-, and fourth-class mail because it has the lowest priority-- it is processed as time allows. The only exception is dated material, such as daily or weekly newspapers and magazines. Delivery of this type of mail should be better than that of other types of second- and third-class mail because it is next in priority after first-class mail.

Parcel post service

Parcel post delivery standards range from overnight within the Milwaukee SCF area to 8 days to California based primarily on distance from the Milwaukee SCF.

The following table shows parcel delivery performance for the Milwaukee SCF area, the Central Region, and the Nation during fiscal year 1976 (through February 27, 1976):

Delivery area	Percent delivered on time						a/
	Originating			Destination			
	Milwaukee SCF	Region	Nation	a/Milwaukee SCF	Region	Nation	
Overnight	83	62	52	83	62	52	
2-day	65	58	58	52	58	58	
3-day	72	46	53	76	45	53	
4-day	63	37	47	52	39	47	
5-day	51	32	43	57	42	43	
6-day	44	36	42	59	32	42	
7-day	64	43	40	60	35	40	
8-day	75	47	44	80	40	44	

a/National averages are much lower than comparable averages for fiscal year 1975. The marked decrease was caused by startup problems of the National Bulk Mail System.

These statistics indicated that postal patrons in southeastern Wisconsin have been receiving better parcel service than those in both the Central Region and the Nation. However, service is inconsistent among various areas and still falls far short of the Service's goals.

Customers have complained of parcel damage, and we believe such complaints have merit. At the Milwaukee SCF, we observed parcel handling several times from April to July 1976 and saw parcels jammed together on conveyor belts, dropped 12 to 15 inches from one conveyor system to another, smashed at the bottom of long chutes by other parcels, and tossed 5 to 10 feet into pouches. Such handling is not conducive to avoiding damage. We also noted parcels marked "fragile" treated the same as other packages.

According to Service statistics, over the last 18 months an average of about 13,200 parcels per 4-week accounting period have required some rewrapping by Milwaukee SCF personnel. Although this represents a small percentage of the average total volume of over 3 million parcels per period, the patron whose parcel is damaged is likely to be dissatisfied.

Milwaukee SCF officials said changes have been made in handling parcel post. (See p. 17.)

## POSTAL PATRONS' VIEWS OF SERVICE

On October 1, 1975, the Service initiated a nationwide program to provide customers with a means to complain and offer suggestions to the Service. Under this program, the postal customer completes a two-part consumer service card; one part for the local post office, the other for postal headquarters. Upon receiving a complaint, the local postmaster is responsible for resolving the problem with the complainant. When the problem has been resolved, the resolution is reported to postal headquarters where it is analyzed.

During a recent 6-month period, 4,174 consumer service cards were filed for the Milwaukee SCF area. As indicated below, 3,844 were complaints, of which 1,722 (about 45 percent) concerned delivery problems. The following table shows the customer concerns by subject area.

Complaints about mail delivery:	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Letters	1,203	28.8
Parcel Post	321	7.7
Newspapers/Magazines	191	4.6
Advertisements	7	.2
	<u>1,722</u>	<u>41.3</u>
Complaints other than mail delivery:		
Hours of Service	437	10.4
Self-Service Postal Units	1,536	36.8
Money Orders	3	.1
Personnel	146	3.5
	<u>2,122</u>	<u>50.8</u>
Other:		
Information requests	81	1.9
Suggestions	188	4.5
Other (compliments, stamps, rates)	61	1.5
	<u>330</u>	<u>7.9</u>
Totals	<u>4,174</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Most delivery complaints concerned delays in receipt of mail. However, a number of such complaints concerned

non-receipt of mail and damage to letters, magazines, and parcels. The many complaints about self-service postal units primarily concerned the failure of these units to work properly. Patrons noted that units were frequently out of stamps, did not make proper change, or simply would not work.

WHAT POSTAL PATRONS' IN SOUTHEASTERN  
WISCONSIN CAN EXPECT IN MAIL SERVICE

Barring dramatic technological breakthroughs or administrative decisions changing delivery standards, postal patrons in southeastern Wisconsin should probably not expect much better service than they now receive. A high percentage of mail will be delivered on time without problems; however, some mail service, especially for second-, third-, and fourth-class mail, will not measure up either to Postal Service goals or patrons' expectations. Service officials stressed that second-, third-, and fourth-class mail is processed after first-class mail and that only increased expenditures could improve delivery performance.

## CHAPTER 3

### WHAT CAUSES MAIL DELIVERY PROBLEMS?

Mail delivery problems have many causes. <sup>1/</sup> The mail distribution system involves a complex transportation and handling network; the potential for error is therefore great.

Problems noted in southeastern Wisconsin involved

- transportation foulups, either mechanical or weather-related;
- human error in sorting and dispatching mail,
- processing equipment breakdowns and malfunctions.

The problems noted above are inherent in a complex system and are often uncontrollable. The room for improvement in the Milwaukee SCF is therefore marginal. Postal personnel should be able to deliver first-class mail within the Service's standard 95 percent of the time. Beyond that, the current system may not permit much improvement.

Measuring the impact of a specific mail delivery problem on mail service is difficult because the impact will depend on related circumstances. For example, a delay of 1 hour in mail arriving at a local post office may or may not affect mail delivery. It depends on how tight the facility's processing schedule is and when the mail arrives. A mistake by the letter sorting machine operator may send a letter destined for New Berlin, Wisconsin, to Kenosha, Wisconsin, probably delaying delivery 1 day. However, the mistake could just as easily send the letter to Maine, delaying delivery several days.

The problems we noted at Milwaukee SCF are discussed below.

#### TRANSPORTATION

The Postal Service moves mail by truck, rail, and air. The movement of a letter may involve more than one mode of transportation.

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<sup>1/</sup>Our discussion focuses on handling of first-class mail, which represents about 70 percent of the mail handled by Milwaukee SCF and is the basis for most delivery complaints.

The effectiveness of the transportation system depends on meeting arrival and departure schedules. Transportation delays occur primarily because of weather and equipment breakdowns. Such delays, will often result in mail being delayed. The following examples illustrate the type of transportation delays encountered and their impact on mail delivery:

- The Milwaukee-Manitowoc-Green Bay, Wisconsin, route had 16 delays between June 1975 and May 1976. Problems included icy roads to dirt in the fuel line. Lengths of delays ranged from 19 minutes to 2 hours and 15 minutes.
- On September 18, 1975, the St. Louis SCF reported that 8 pouches from Milwaukee (about 12,000 first-class letters) arrived after cutoff time (the time by which all destination mail must be processed to meet the last outgoing transportation). Delivery of this mail was delayed 1 day. Late arrival was attributed to the air taxi being canceled at Midway Airport (Chicago) because of mechanical problems.
- On March 5, 1976, the Milwaukee SCF received about 2,400 first-class letters from Minneapolis, 4 hours after operating cutoff time. Late arrival was attributed to cancellation of air-taxi service due to a blizzard. As a result, delivery of this mail was delayed 1 day.

#### PROCESSING

The key to an efficient processing system is the SCF. Mail arrives at SCFs in bags and is emptied onto a conveyor belt, where it is separated for processing. The originating stamped mail is routed through a canceling machine and on to a letter sorting machine. At this point, mail is sorted by ZIP codes and pouched by destination. Pouches are routed to transportation docks for transfer to local post offices, air terminals, or other SCFs.

According to Postal Service statistics, about 1.5 percent of Milwaukee SCF mail is sent or dispatched improperly (missent) within the region and about 2.6 percent is missent throughout the rest of the Nation. This compares favorably with a 1.9-percent missent rate for the 13-State Central Region and a 3.6-percent rate nationwide.

### Letter sorting

The aspect of postal operations most critical to timely delivery is the sorting process. In Milwaukee, this process is done by letter sorting machines. Each machine has 12 operating positions, and usually has 2 loaders who place letters on the console and 4 sweepers who take the sorted letters from bins. The operators depress keys corresponding to numbers in the letter's ZIP code or other special codes. These machines usually operate at 60 letters per minute; thus, the operator has 1 second to recognize and key certain numbers of the ZIP code. The operator cannot slow the machine or stop it to correct an error.

The computer interprets the operator's keying entry and directs the letters to 1 of 277 bins. Accumulated letters are taken from the bin, screened for correct destination, put in pouches labeled to show their destination and released for transportation.

A mistake in this process, such as incorrectly keying the ZIP code, may cause letters to be missent. The machine may also malfunction and route mail to the wrong bin.

Statistics show that, during fiscal year 1976, in the Milwaukee SCF operators had keying error rates ranging from 0.1 to 7.9 percent. Machine error rates during this period ranged from zero to 2.1 percent. Cumulative statistics are not kept for operator and machine error.

We examined 3,244 letters after the sorting operation and found that 133 (4.1 percent) were incorrectly sorted. Some examples were:

- Of 15 letters in the La Crosse bin, 1 was addressed to Neenah and 1 to Burlington.
- Of 31 letters in the Mt. Calvary bin, 1 was addressed to Menomonee Falls.
- Of 21 letters in the Chippewa Falls bin, 14 should have been routed to Pewaukee, Wisconsin; Portland, Oregon; and various addresses in Texas.

If these errors were not caught in the sweeping operation, the letters would be routed to the wrong cities and the mail would be delayed.

### Sweeping

This process involves removing letters from the sorting bins and placing them in pouches. Generally, this is the last chance to catch a missorted letter before it enters the transportation network. To catch mistakes, the sweepers riffle the stack to look for mail that does not belong in the bin. The effectiveness of this process depends greatly on the conscientiousness of the employee; but even at best, it is not a highly effective process.

We sampled 1,391 letters pouched for dispatch and found that 35 (2.5 percent) were destined to be missent. For example:

--One letter in the New York pouch was addressed to Eagle, Wisconsin.

--Of 35 letters in the Atlanta, Georgia, pouch, 1 was addressed to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and 1 was addressed to Washington, D.C.

Such mistakes can clearly cause major problems for postal patrons.

### Pouching

Errors can also be made in the pouching process. Once the mail is pouched, it is sent to the transportation area to be loaded on the correct truck.

We reviewed missent mail reports received from local post offices in southeastern Wisconsin. We found numerous examples of missent mail being received at these offices. Missent mail can result from sorting errors not caught by sweeping or from incorrect pouching. Unlike individual letter sorting and sweeping errors, pouching mistakes will result in larger numbers of letters being delayed.

### Canceling

Another factor causing mail delay and postal customer frustration is mail that is damaged or destroyed during processing. Mutilation of mail will usually occur during canceling. This is a high-speed operation--22,000 letters an hour--during which some mail can be thrown out of or caught in the mechanism. Statistics on the number of pieces mutilated by these machines are not maintained, but between June 1975 and May 1976, about 5,300 hours were required to repair mutilated mail at the Milwaukee SCP.

AGENCY COMMENTS

According to Milwaukee officials, these problems cannot be completely eliminated. Some improvement could be made by increasing the conscientiousness of employees, and by adding personnel and transportation routes. However, such additions are not economically feasible. They believed that overnight delivery performance could probably never get much better than 98 percent.

Local officials feel they have been doing the best job possible within budget limitations. They added that the staff-hour budget for fiscal year 1977 is about 9.6 percent (1 million staff hours valued at about \$9 million) below fiscal year 1976 actual usage. They said this reduction is bound to hurt delivery performance in southeastern Wisconsin.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHANGES IN PROCESSING AND DISTRIBUTION

#### AT MILWAUKEE SCF

The Postal Service has recently made or is planning to make certain changes in the distribution and processing of mail in southeastern Wisconsin. They involve

- realigning mail sorting functions of SCF's, increasing the Milwaukee SCF's daily volume by about 270,000 pieces;
- transferring some parcel post operations from the Milwaukee SCF to the bulk mail facility at Chicago; and
- bringing most of the first-class local post offices under the area mail processing concept.

These changes may offer economies but are unlikely to improve the area's mail service.

#### REALIGNING MAIL SORTING FUNCTIONS

In March 1976, the Milwaukee SCF's mail sorting functions were realigned. This change essentially involved redesignating the locations for which an SCF would sort mail. The primary effect of this change is to decrease the workload in most SCFs--generally manual facilities--but increase it for the more mechanized State distribution centers. At the Milwaukee SCF--Wisconsin's State distribution center--daily volume has been increased by about 270,000 pieces.

Why was such a change made? According to postal officials, it was to lessen the workload in most SCFs, many of which were manual operations. This lessened workload is to permit most SCFs to be more effective.

How will this change affect service? Most patrons will receive their mail in the same manner and as quickly as before. However, it is possible that this change may decrease the likelihood of mail destined for a 2-day delivery arriving in 1 day. To illustrate, a letter going from Springfield, Illinois, to Madison, Wisconsin, is in the Postal Service's 2-day delivery area. Under the old procedure, the Springfield SCF would sort to the Madison SCF and route the letter directly, and it was often delivered in 1 day.

Under the new procedure, the letter will be routed from Springfield to Milwaukee for processing and then to Madison. Under this procedure, it would be virtually impossible for such a letter to arrive in 1 day.

#### PARCEL POST OPERATIONS

On June 7, 1976, the Milwaukee SCF parcel post operations were incorporated in the bulk mail system. (See GAO report B-114874, Nov. 1, 1974, for a discussion of this system.) Under this change, a number of parcels now processed by the Milwaukee SCF will be handled by the bulk mail facility in Chicago.

However, the Milwaukee SCF will still process parcels:

- Originating in the Milwaukee SCF area and destined for delivery in the Milwaukee, Madison, Portage, Green Bay, and Oshkosh SCF areas,
- Such as film canisters and parcels over 25 pounds, that cannot be processed through the bulk mail center.

The Postal Service expects the automated bulk mail centers to provide quicker, more consistent, and damage-free parcel delivery.

#### AREA MAIL PROCESSING

The Service intends by October 1976 to put all but three (Racine, Kenosha, and Waukesha) first-class post offices in southeastern Wisconsin under the area mail processing concept. Currently, offices not under that concept cancel all locally deposited mail and partially distribute it. Under area mail processing, most canceling and distribution operations will be moved to the Milwaukee SCF. According to Postal officials, this change will achieve more efficient processing through better use of existing facilities and distribution procedures at the SCF. They also project that 92 fewer staff-hours will be needed daily within the SCF area.

The effect of this change will be to shift some workload from local post offices to the SCF. Postal officials foresee no deterioration in delivery service.

## CHAPTER 5

### SCOPE OF REVIEW

Our work included a review of service policies and procedures followed by the central region, the Milwaukee district and sectional center, and various post offices; observation of processing operations; discussion of problems with officials at the sectional center and selected post offices; a review of complaint files; and analysis of responses to a Congressman's questionnaire on the quality of mail service.

ROBERT W. KASTEN, JR.  
WISCONSIN

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
Washington, D.C. 20515

February 18, 1976

B-114874

The Honorable Elmer B. Staats  
Comptroller General of the United States  
General Accounting Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D. C. 20548

Dear Mr. Comptroller General:

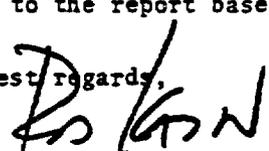
Since taking office in January, 1975, I have been increasingly concerned about the number of complaints from constituents regarding the quality of mail service being provided by the U.S. Postal Service, as with each passing month, the number of complaints I receive from Wisconsin citizens increases.

I am requesting the assistance of the General Accounting Office. I should like the GAO to undertake an intensive review of the quality of mail service in the State of Wisconsin, comparing delivery performance in Wisconsin with regional and national performance, as well as a comparison with the Postal Service's goal of 95 percent on-time delivery. Second, I should like to know what, if any, actions are being taken by the Postal Service to correct the present deficiencies.

The delays which have been brought to my attention have been too numerous, and demonstrate too dramatically a recurring pattern, to be ignored.

I am looking forward to the report based upon your study of this situation.

Best regards,

  
ROBERT W. KASTEN, JR.  
Member of Congress

RWK:yck

GAO note: In accordance with agreements reached with Congressman Kasten's office, the scope of this review was limited to the counties of south-eastern Wisconsin.

WISCONSIN COUNTIES AND POST OFFICES INCLUDED IN THE  
MILWAUKEE SECTIONAL CENTER AREA

Wisconsin Counties Included in the  
Milwaukee Sectional Center Area

Calumet	Ozaukee
Dodge	Racine
Fond Du Lac	Sheboygan
Jefferson	Walworth
Kenosha	Washington
Milwaukee	Waukesha
Manitowoc	

Wisconsin Post Offices Included in the  
Milwaukee Sectional Center Area

Adell	Eagle
Allenton	East Troy
Ashippun	Eden
Bassett	Elkhart Lake
Belgium	Elkhorn
Big Bend	Elm Grove
Bristol	Fontana
Brookfield	Franksville
Brownsville	Fredonia
Burlington	Genesee Depot
Butler	Genoa City
Caledonia	Germantown
Campbellsport	Glenbeulah
Camp Lake	Grafton
Cascade	Greenbush
Cedarburg	Greendale
Cedar Grove	Hales Corners
Chilton	Hartford
Cleveland	Hartland
Clyman	Haven
Colgate	Helenville
Cudahy	Hingham
Darien	Honey Creek
Delafield	Horicon
Delavan	Huberius
Dousman	Hustiford

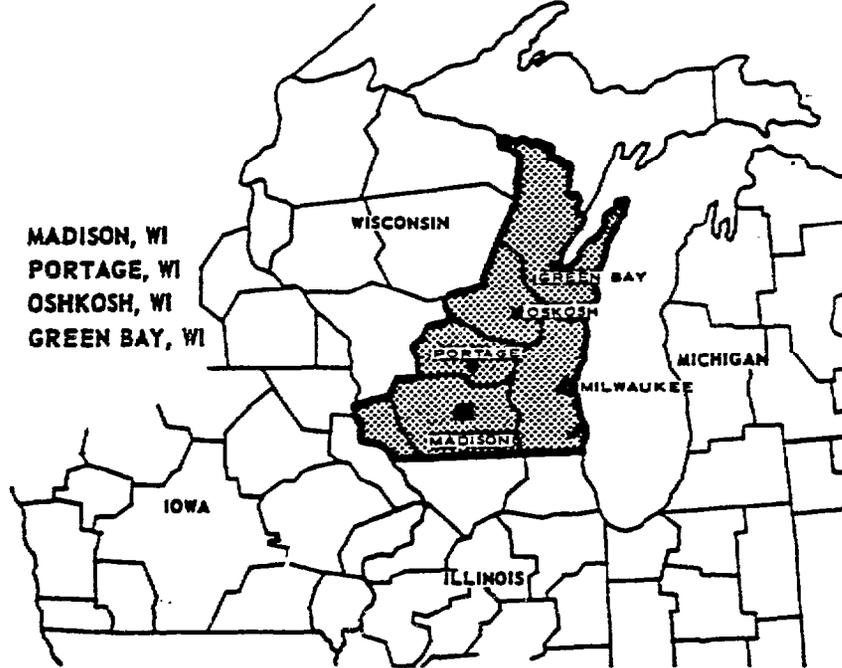
## APPENDIX II

## APPENDIX II

Iron Ridge	Racine
Ixonia	Random Lake
Jackson	Richfield
Johnson Creek	Rochester
Juneau	Rockfield
Kansasville	Rubicon
Kenosha	Saint Cloud
Kewaskum	Salem
Kiel	Saukville
Knowles	Sheboygan
Kohler	Sheboygan Falls
Lake Geneva	Silver Lake
Lannon	Slinger
Lebanon	Somers
Lomira	South Byron
Lyons	South Milwaukee
Malone	Springfield
Mayville	Stockbridge
Menomonee Falls	Sturtevant
Merton	Sullivan
Milwaukee	Sussex
Mount Calvary	Taycheedah
Mukwonago	Thiensville
Muskego	Trevor
Nashoiah	Troy Center
Neosho	Twin Lakes
Newburg	Union Grove
New Holstein	Waldo
New Munster	Wales
Newton	Walworth
North Lake	Waterford
North Prairie	Watertown
Oak Creek	Waukesha
Oakfield	West Bend
Oconomowoc	Whitewater
Okauchee	Williams Bay
Oostburg	Wilmot
Palmyra	Wood
Pell Lake	Woodland
Pewaukee	Woodworth
Pleasant Prairie	Zenda
Plymouth	
Port Washington	
Powers Lake	

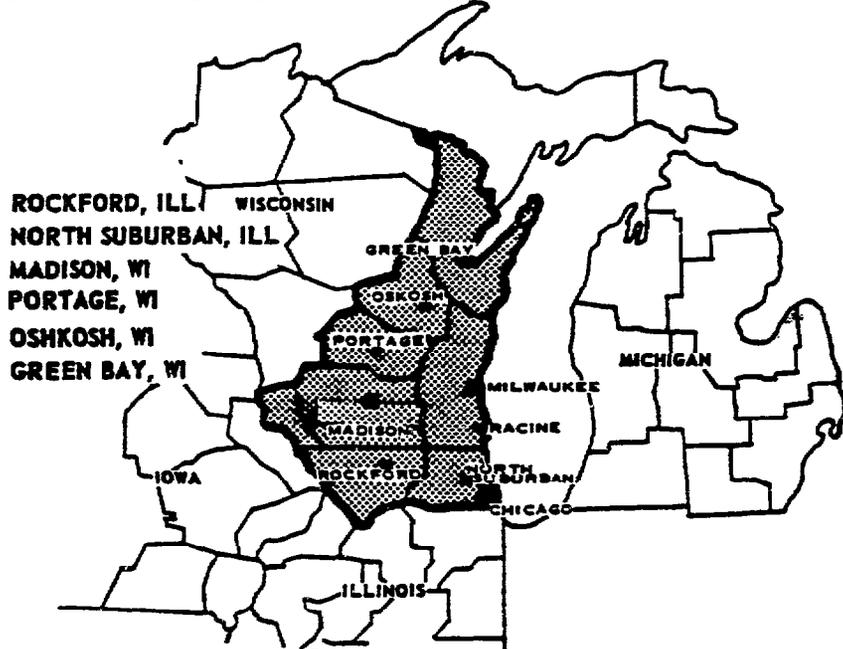
**OVERNIGHT SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITIES  
SERVED BY MILWAUKEE SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY**

**DESTINATION:  
MILWAUKEE**



**OVERNIGHT SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITIES  
SERVED BY MILWAUKEE SECTIONAL CENTER FACILITY**

**ORIGINATING:  
MILWAUKEE**



DELIVERY AREAS UPGRADED UNDERSERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMMilwaukee Sectional CenterOvernight Cities

Akron, Ohio	Kansas City, Missouri
Cincinnati, Ohio	Louisville, Kentucky
Cleveland, Ohio	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Columbus, Ohio	Omaha, Nebraska
Des Moines, Iowa	St. Louis, Missouri
Detroit, Michigan	St. Paul, Minnesota
Grand Rapids, Michigan	Toledo, Ohio
Indianapolis, Indiana	Wichita, Kansas

States Upgraded from 3-day to 2-day Service

Arizona	New Jersey
California	New Mexico
Colorado	New York
Connecticut	Oklahoma
Georgia	Pennsylvania
Louisiana	Texas (Central Section only)
Nevada	Utah